DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 345 854 PS 020 547

AUTHOR Hartup, Willard W.
TITLE Having Friends, Making Friends, and Keeping Friends: Relationships as Educational Contexts. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, Urbana, Ill.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO EDO-PS-92-4
PUB DATE 92
CONTRACT RI88062012
NOTE 3p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses - ERIC Clearinghouse Products (071) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Child Psychology; *Children; *Cognitive Development; Developmental Psychology; Elementary Secondary Education; *Friendship; *Peer Relationship; Personality Development; Preschool Education; *Psychological Patterns; *Social Development
IDENTIFIERS ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

Peer relations contribute substantially to both social and cognitive development. The essentials of friendship are reciprocity and commitment between individuals who see themselves more or less as equals. Affiliation and common interests, the main themes in friendship relations, are first understood in early childhood. Friends serve as emotional resources, affording children the security to strike out into new territory and acting as buffers from negative events. Friends also act as cognitive resources, for they teach each other through peer tutoring, cooperative learning, peer collaboration, and peer modeling. Because cooperation and conflict occur more readily in friendships than in other social contexts, friendships are also important to the development of social skills, and children's friendships are thought to be templates for subsequent relationships. Although relatively few investigators have sought to verify the developmental significance of friendship, emerging evidence suggests that having friends, making friends, and keeping friends forecast good developmental outcomes. These outcomes may appear in the areas of positive self-attitudes and the functioning of future relationships. Children with friends are better off than children without friends, though if necessary, other relationships can be substituted for friendships. Consequently, friendships should be viewed as developmental advantages, rather than developmental necessities, and evidence concerning friendships as educational contexts should be read in this light. (AC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education
University of Illinois
805 West Pennsylvania Avenue
Urbana, Illinois 61801
(217) 333-1386

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ERIC Digest

EDO-PS-92-4

ED345854

Having Friends, Making Friends, and Keeping Friends: Relationships as Educational Contexts

Willard W. Hartup

PS020547

Peer relations contribute substantially to both social and cognitive development and to the effectiveness with which we function as adults. Indeed, the single best childhood predictor of adult adaptation is not school grades, and not classroom behavior, but rather, the adequacy with which the child gets along with other children. Children who are generally disliked, who are aggressive and disruptive, who are unable to sustain close relationships with other children, and who cannot establish a place for themselves in the peer culture, are seriously at risk.

The Conditions of Friendship

The essentials of friendship are reciprocity and commitment between individuals who see themselves more or less as equals. Interaction between friends rests on a more equal power base than the interaction between children and adults. Some writers regard friendships as "affiliative relations" rather than attachments; nonetheless, young children make a large emotional investment in their friends, and their relationships are relatively enduring.

The main themes in friendship relations—affiliation and common interests—are first understood by children in early childhood. Among preschool and younger school-aged children, expectations for friendship center on common pursuits and concrete reciprocities. Later, children's views about their friends center on mutual understanding, loyalty, and trust. Children also expect to spend time with their friends, share their interests, and engage in self-disclosure with them. Friends have fun with one another; they enjoy doing things together; and they care about one another. Although school-aged children and adolescents never use words like *empathy* or *intimacy* to describe their friends, in their thinking, these constructs distinguish friends from other children.

Friendship Functions

Friendships are:

- emotional resources, both for having fun and adapting to stress;
- cognitive resources for problem-solving and knowledge acquisition;
- contexts in which basic social skills (for example, social communication, cooperation, and group entry skills) are acquired or elaborated; and
- forerunners of subsequent relationships.

Above all, friendships are egalitarian. They are symmetrically or horizontally structured, in contrast to adult-child relationships, which are asymmetrically or vertically structured. Friends are similar to each other in developmental status, engaging each other mostly in play and socializing.

Friends as emotional resources. As emotional resources, friendships furnish children with the security to strike out into new territory, meet new people, and tackle new problems. Friends set the emotional stage for exploring one's surroundings, not unlike the manner in which caretakers serve as secure bases for the young child. These relationships also support the processes involved with having fun. Researchers have found that the duration and frequency of laughing, smiling, looking, and talking are greater between friends than between strangers, and that friends mimic one another more extensively.

Friendships may buffer children and adolescents from the adverse effects of negative events, such as family conflict, terminal illness, parents' unemployment, and school failure. Some studies suggest that friendships ease the stress associated with divorce, though in different manners for boys and girls. School-aged boys turn readily to friends, seemingly to distance themselves from the troubled household. Girls, however, enter into friendships but need their mothers' support.

Friends as cognitive resources. Children teach one another in many situations and are generally effective in this activity. Peer teaching occurs in four main varieties:

- *Peer tutoring* is the didactic transmission of information from one child to another, ordinarily from an expert to a novice.
- *Cooperative learning* requires children to combine problem-solving contributions and share rewards.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

- *Peer collaboration*, in contrast, occurs when novices work together on tasks that neither can do separately.
- *Peer modeling* refers to information transferred by imitation.

It has yet to be determined whether friends are better tutors than nonfriends or the manner in which friendship affects cooperative learning and modeling. Peer collaboration among both friends and nonfriends has been studied more extensively. One would expect friends to share motives and develop verbal and motor scripts that enable them to combine their talents in achieving their goals. And indeed, recent studies show that collaboration with friends results in more mastery of certain tasks than collaboration between nonfriends. Friends talk more, take more time to work out differences in their understanding of game rules, and compromise more readily than nonfriends do. This evidence suggests that friendships are unique contexts for transmitting information from one child to another.

Friends and social skills. Considerable evidence shows that both cooperation and conflict occur more readily in friendships than in other contexts. Preschool children engage in more frequent cooperative exchanges with their friends than with neutral associates or with children whom they don't like. Conflicts occur more often between friends than nonfriends, but friends emphasize disengagement and equity in conflict management to a greater extent than nonfriends do. Research corroborates the notion that children's relationships with their friends support cooperation and reciprocity and effective conflict management.

Friendship and subsequent relationships. Children's friendships are thought to be templates for subsequent relationships. While new relationships are never exact copies of old ones, the organization of behavior in relationships generalizes from old ones to new ones. Smoothly functioning friendships have been shown to rub-off on relationships between preschool children and their younger siblings.

Friendship Experience and Developmental Outcomes

Relatively few investigators have actually sought to verify the developmental significance of friendship. The issue is certainly complicated. Close relationships may support good adjustment and its development, but, alternatively, well-adjusted children may simply be better at establishing friendships than poorly adjusted ones. Nevertheless, studies show that friendships forecast good adjustment during the early weeks of kindergarten, and that making new friends changes children's adjustment in positive directions during the school year.

Outcomes, however, may depend on the nature of the relationship. Friendships are not all alike. Some are secure and smooth-sailing; others are rocky with disagreement and contention. New evidence shows that these differences spill over into school adjustment. Students whose friendships are marked by conflict and rivalry become progressively disruptive and disengaged. However, close relationships are unlikely to contribute to *everything*. While emerging evidence strongly suggests that having friends, making friends, and keeping them forecasts good developmental outcomes, it is unlikely that these results can be attributed *exclusively* to such relationships. On the contrary, friendship may contribute more to certain adaptations, such as positive self-attitudes or self-regard, than to social skills broadly conceived. Friendship may also contribute more to relationship functioning (for example, with siblings, other friends, or romantic partners) than to being generally well-liked.

Whether friends are *necessities* in child and adolescent development remains uncertain. Should friends not be available, other relationships may be elastic enough to serve the friendship functions enumerated earlier. Children with friends are better off than children without friends, but if necessary, other relationships may be substituted for friendships. Consequently, friendships are best viewed as developmental advantages rather than developmental necessities, and the current evidence concerning friendships as educational contexts should be read in this light.

Editor's Note: This is the first in a series of three ERIC/EECE digests that focus on children's peer relationships as educational contexts. These digests are adapted from articles that originally appeared in the Fall 1991 (Vol. 19, No. 1) issue of the *Early Report* of the University of Minnesota's Center for Early Education and Development.

For More Information:

Hartup, Willard W., and Moore, Shirley G. "Early Peer Relations: Developmental Significance and Prognostic Implications." *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 5 (March, 1990): 1-17.

Hartup, Willard W., and Laursen, Brett. *Contextual Constraints and Children's Friendship Relations.* ERIC Document number ED 310 848.

Katz, Lilian G., and McClellan, Diane E. *The Teacher's Role in the Social Development of Young Children.* Urbana, IL: ERIC/EECE, 1991. ED 331 642.

Ladd, Gary W. "Having Friends, Keeping Friends, Making Friends and Being Liked by Peers in the Classroom: Predictors of Children's Early School Adjustment?" *Child Development* 61 (August, 1990): 1,081-1,100.

This publication was funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. OERI 88-062012. Opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI. ERIC Digests are in the public domain and may be freely reproduced and disseminated.